Unit 1

Early Humans and the Indus Valley Civilization

Resource Booklet

1.1 Hunter Gatherers

For most of human history, people lived as Hunter-Gatherers. A hunter-gatherer is a person who lives in a society where food is collected by hunting wild animals or by searching for wild, edible plants. Archaeologists have shown that most early humans lived in areas of woodland. This gave them access to a wide range of nuts, seeds and fruits. People would also seek out rivers and coastlines for fishing and finding shellfish.

Hunter-gatherers know that they live off finite resources. They must never take more from one place in a year than can be replaced naturally in the next. This means that no one is allowed to take too much of anything – food, possessions, power, as this may upset the balance, not only of the group, but also of the environment.

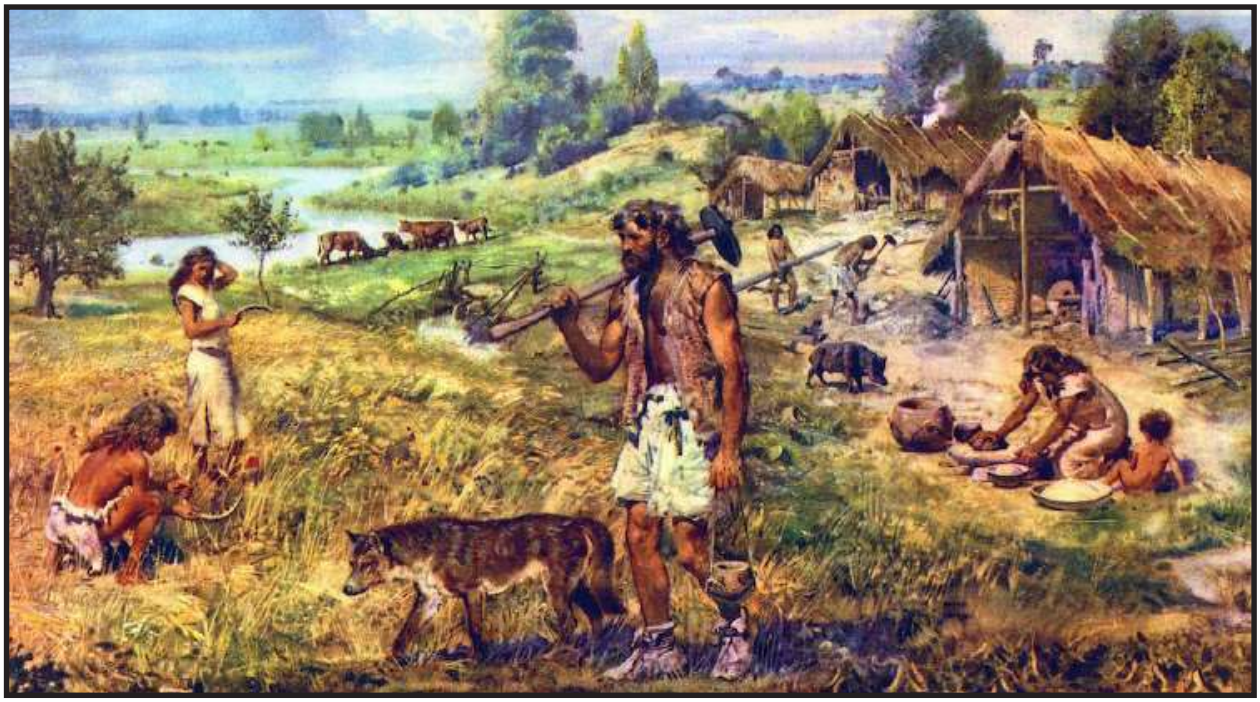
Over time, humans became good hunters. Hunters mostly went after herd beasts such as deer, wooly mammoth, and saber-toothed tigers! They had bows and stone tipped arrows, stone spears, stone knives and axes, and they built snares and pits to catch animals. As most of the tools used by humans at this point of time were made out of stone, we refer to this period as the stone age.

Above Left: *A drawing depicting early humans gathering fruits, root vegetables and berries*
Above Right*: There are still groups of hunter gatherers all over the world. In the Arctic, the Inuit people hunt walrus and travel in nomadic groups across the ice, where modern farming methods do not work. In Africa, the Hazda people of Tanzania live in a tribe of around 1,300 people and are known to be one of the oldest 'lineages' of humankind. The man above on the right is a member of the Hadza tribe in Tanzania.*

Agriculture - the science and work of raising crops and farm animals; farming. (*noun*)

Above: One of the skills other than farming that early humans soon mastered was the art of turning metal ores into metal. In the drawing above, early humans can be seen smelting ore to extract the metal.

Below: During the agricultural revolution, humans began to settle down. In the drawing below, an early human settlement is shown. How do you think life in the village would be different from life during Paleolithic times?



Above: An artistic representation of life in a late Neolithic society

Smelt - From Middle Low German *smelten*; (melt).

1.3 Rise of Civilizations

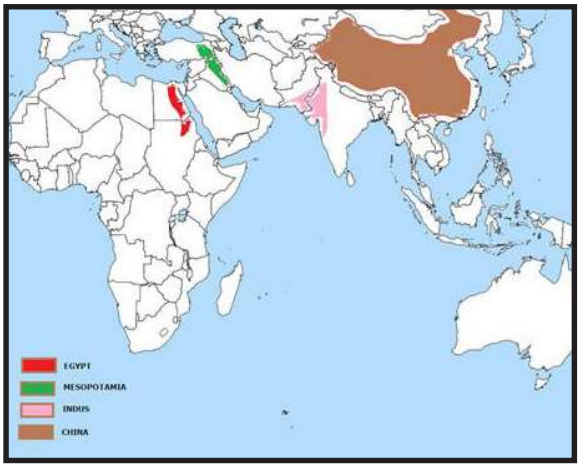
A civilization is a complex human society, usually made up of different cities, with certain characteristics of cultural and technological development. In many parts of the world, early civilizations formed when people began coming together in urban settlements.

The word "civilization" relates to the Latin word "civitas" or "city." This is why the most basic definition of the word "civilization" is "a society made up of cities."

As mentioned earlier, many human civilizations had mastered the art of working with metals - specifically bronze - by this time. For this reason, these civilizations are also referred to as "Bronze Age civilizations". These civilizations began to form towards the end of the Neolithic era.

The first civilizations arose on the banks of rivers.

- The Ancient Egyptians, who were based along the river Nile,
- The Mesopotamians in the Fertile Crescent on the Tigris/Euphrates rivers,
- The Ancient Chinese civilization, centered around the Yellow River
- The Indus Valley Civilization based in the Indus River Valley.



***Left**: An artistic representation of what a Bronze Age society may have looked like*

Civilization - an advanced state of development of a society as judged by such things

Why did people choose to settle next to rivers?

Rivers were attractive locations for the first civilizations because they provided a steady supply of drinking water and made the land fertile for growing crops. Moreover, goods and people could be transported easily, and the people in these civilizations could fish and hunt the animals that came to drink water. Additionally, those lost in the wilderness could return to civilization by traveling downstream, where the major centers of human population tend to concentrate.

Even nowadays, people tend to live in land next to rivers, specifically in regions that face water shortages. Look at the map of Egypt shown below, and observe the dark ribbon that runs through the center. That is the strip of greenery that lies on either side of the Nile river. This greenery is made possible by the life-giving water the Nile provides.

Above: An artistic depiction of fishermen in Ancient Egypt catching fish in the river Nile. Fish were an important part of the diet of most river valley civilizations.

***Below**: The dark green ribbon snaking through Egypt is the expanse of greenery and irrigated farmland on either side of the Nile river.*

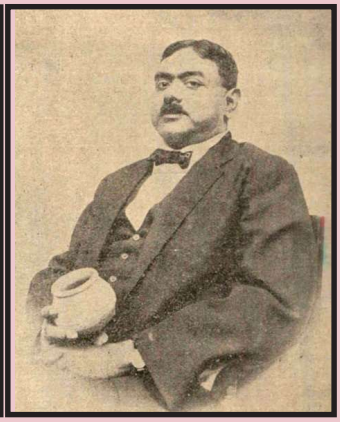
Civilization - From the Latin *civitas* (city). This is why it is sometimes used to

1.4 The Indus Valley Civilization

The Indus Valley civilization was discovered by archaeologists in the 1880s. It developed along the Indus River and the Ghaggar-Hakra River and in areas that are now in modern Pakistan, north-west India and Afghanistan. The civilization started during the Bronze Age and was at the height of its development between 2500 BC and 1500 BC.

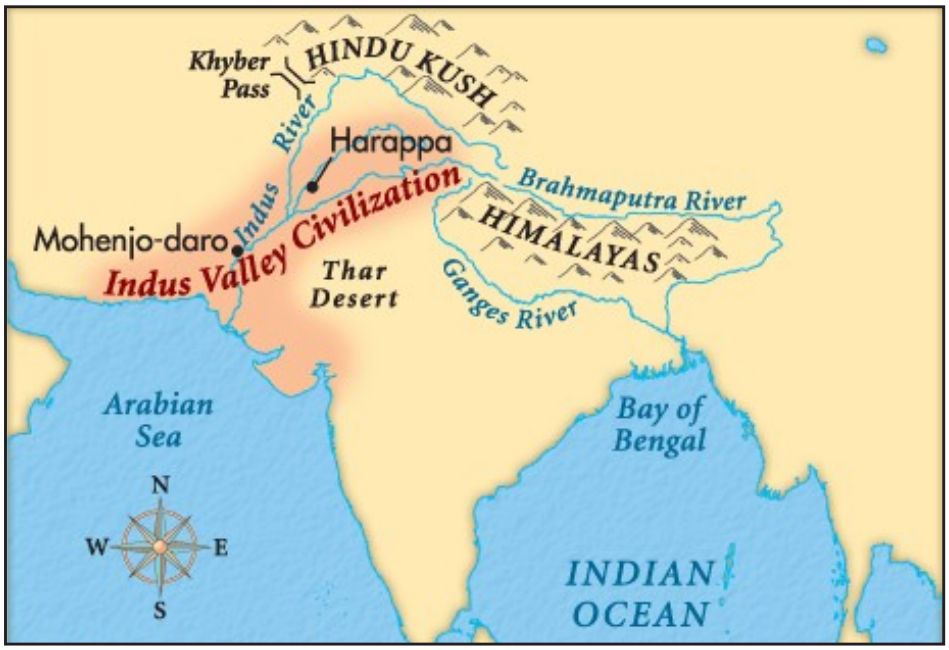
The Indus Valley civilization covered a large area – from Balochistan (Pakistan) to Gujarat (India). The first city to be discovered by excavation was Harappa and therefore this civilization is also known as 'Harappan Civilization'.

In 1842 Charles Masson wrote a book that mentioned the sites of Indus Valley Civilisation. Few people paid attention. Later, in 1921-22, John Marshall organized the first archaeological dig at Harappa. In 1950 Sir Mortimer Wheeler led further excavations in the Indus sites.



Sir John Marshall (Top left) was born on March 19, 1876 in Chester, United Kingdom. He was at the forefront of the archeology era in India being a prominent scholar who focused on the Indian archaeology scene.

The discovery of Harappa in the early 20th century was a pivotal moment in Marshall's career. Marshall had already started allowing Indians to head their own excavation teams, and Daya Ram Sahni at Harappa and R.D. Bannerjee (Top right) at Mohenjodaro made amazing breakthroughs and discoveries.



***Left**: A map showing the location of the Indus Valley Civilization. The sites are spread across the modern day countries of Pakistan and India.*

Archaeology - the study of past human life. An archaeologist digs up and then studies

Indus Valley Town Planning

The inhabitants of the Indus Valley civilization were good builders. The ruins of the sites show skillful design. Their buildings had two or sometimes more stories. The bathrooms were attached to the rooms. One of the unique features of the city was its elaborate drainage system. A brick-lined drainage channel flowed alongside every street. Removable bricks were placed at regular intervals for easy cleaning and inspection.

The Great Granary at Harappa was a massive structure used to store surplus food grains. This granary was located near the river to make transporting the grain easier. A similar structure has been found in Mohenjodaro, highlighting the similarities between the two towns.

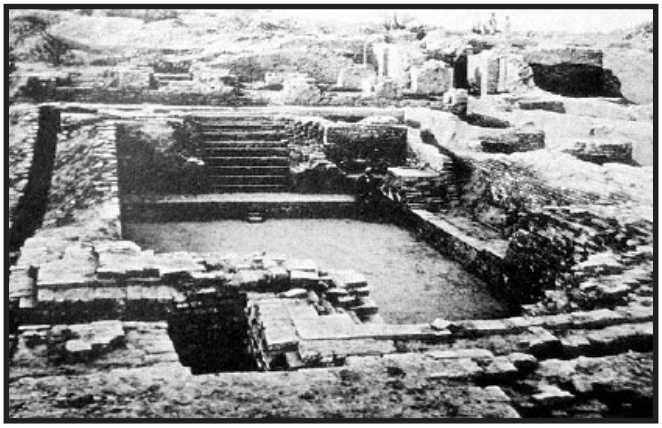
Above: The granaries at Harappa

The cities show clear evidence of town planning with broad streets and efficient access to water, drainage and sewers in even the smallest houses. We can tell that the streets were laid out before the houses were built. Houses were generally set around central courtyards with windows facing into the yards rather than out onto the streets. Rooms had clear purposes and included space for bathing and toilets that were flushed by pouring water into them.

The Great Bath of Mohenjodaro is a very unique structure. It was a rectangular structure with six different entrances, all leading to a central bathing pool. It used to be filled with water on special occasions. Though historians are still not entirely sure what the purpose of this building was, a generally accepted theory is that it was used for ritual bathing purposes and probably had some religious significance.

The fertile plains of the Indus Valley provided an ideal site for early settlers. Irrigation and the use of the plough enabled many crops to be grown throughout the year and surpluses to be stored in communal granaries. Animals such as goats, cows, sheep and buffalo were domesticated and other animals were probably hunted. Dogs, cats, monkeys and peacocks may have been kept as pets.

Although no evidence has been found of kings or priests it is clear that the cities must have been well governed. Only a limited number of weapons have been recovered and there is little evidence of conflict.



Right: An original photo of the Great Bath taken by Marshall's excavation team.

[Original 1931 text] "The Great Bath, which I have reserved to the last, was part of what appears to have been a vast hydropathic establishment and the most imposing of all the remains unearthed at Mohenjo-daro." (Marshall, Vol. I, p. 24)

Archeology - From Greek *arkhaios* (ancient) + *logia* (the study of)

Indus Valley Town Planning

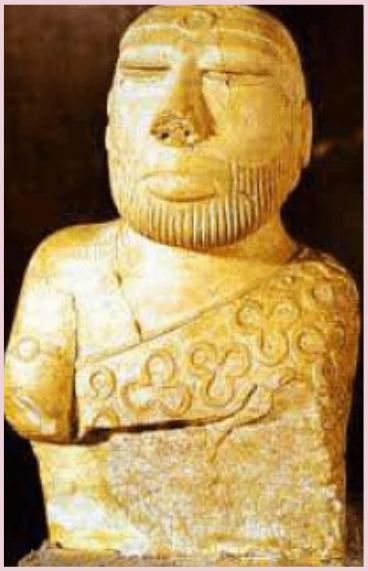
The Indus Valley cities were divided into two sections - the citadel (or the upper town), and the lower town. The citadel was usually located on a high area of ground above the rest of the city. There was a strong wall of burnt bricks separating the upper town from the lower town. Historians believe that the citadel was occupied by the ruling class, and the lower town was occupied by the common people.

The citadel contained many important public buildings of the town. Many of the buildings excavated by archaeologists such as the Great Granary of Harappa and the Great Bath of Mohenjodaro were built inside the citadel.

The map shown below is from a film called Mohenjodaro. The map is an artistic representation of what the city of Mohenjodaro might have looked like. You can clearly see the upper and lower cities indicated in the map along with the nearby river.

Excavate - to uncover by digging (*verb*)

Indus Valley Art



Bearded Priest:

The figure of the bearded man, interpreted as a priest, is draped in a shawl coming under the right arm and covering the left shoulder. This shawl is decorated with trefoil patterns. The eyes are a little elongated, and half-closed as if in meditative concentration. The nose is well formed and of medium size.

Dancing Girl:

One of the best known artifacts from the Indus Valley is this approximately four-inch-high copper figure of a dancing girl. Found in Mohenjodaro, this exquisite casting depicts a girl whose long hair is tied in a bun. Bangles cover her left arm, a bracelet and an amulet or bangle adorn her right arm, and a cowry shell necklace is seen around her neck. Her right hand is on her hip and her left hand is clasped in a traditional Indian dance gesture. She has large eyes and a flat nose. This figure is full of expression and bodily vigor.

Bronze Bull:

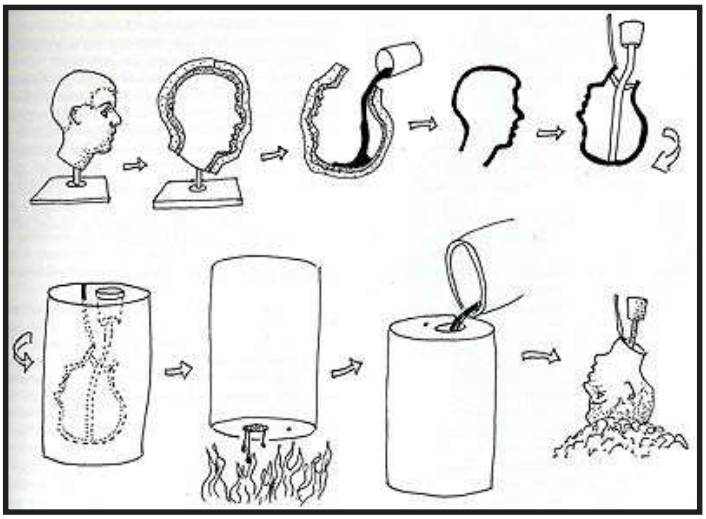
This bronze figure of a bull from Mohenjodaro deserves mention. The massiveness of the bull and the fury of the charge are eloquently expressed. The animal is shown standing with his head turned to the right.

Excavate - from Latin *ex* (out) + *cavare* (make or become hollow)

Lost Wax Bronze Casting

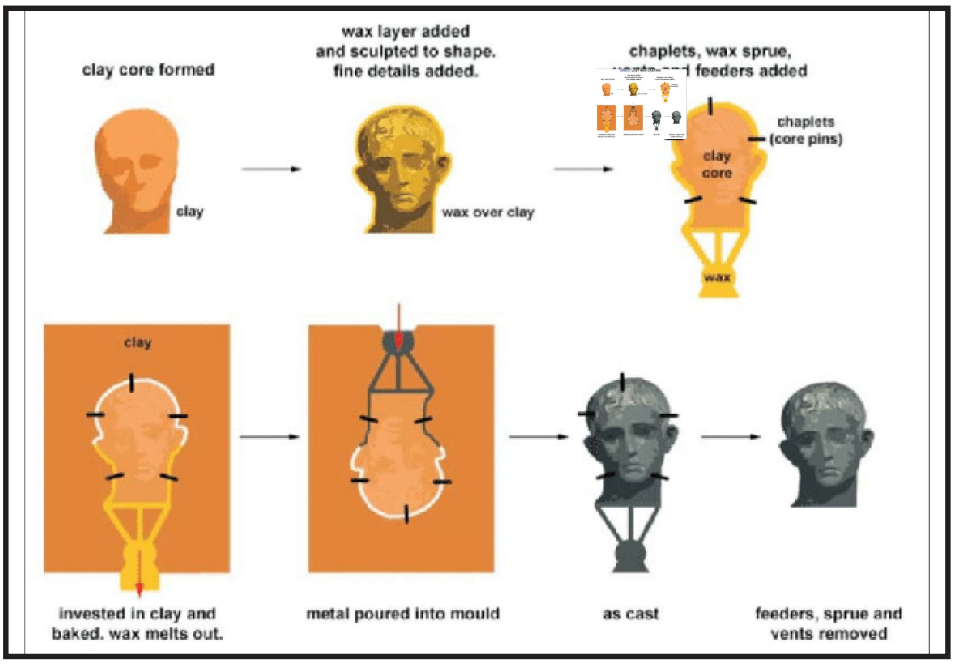
The art of bronze-casting was practiced on a wide scale by the Harappans. Their bronze statues were made using the 'lost wax' technique in which the wax figures were first covered with a coating of clay and allowed to dry.

Then the wax was heated and the molten wax was drained out through a tiny hole made in the clay cover. The hollow mold thus created was filled with molten metal which took the original shape of the object. Once the metal cooled, the clay cover was completely removed.



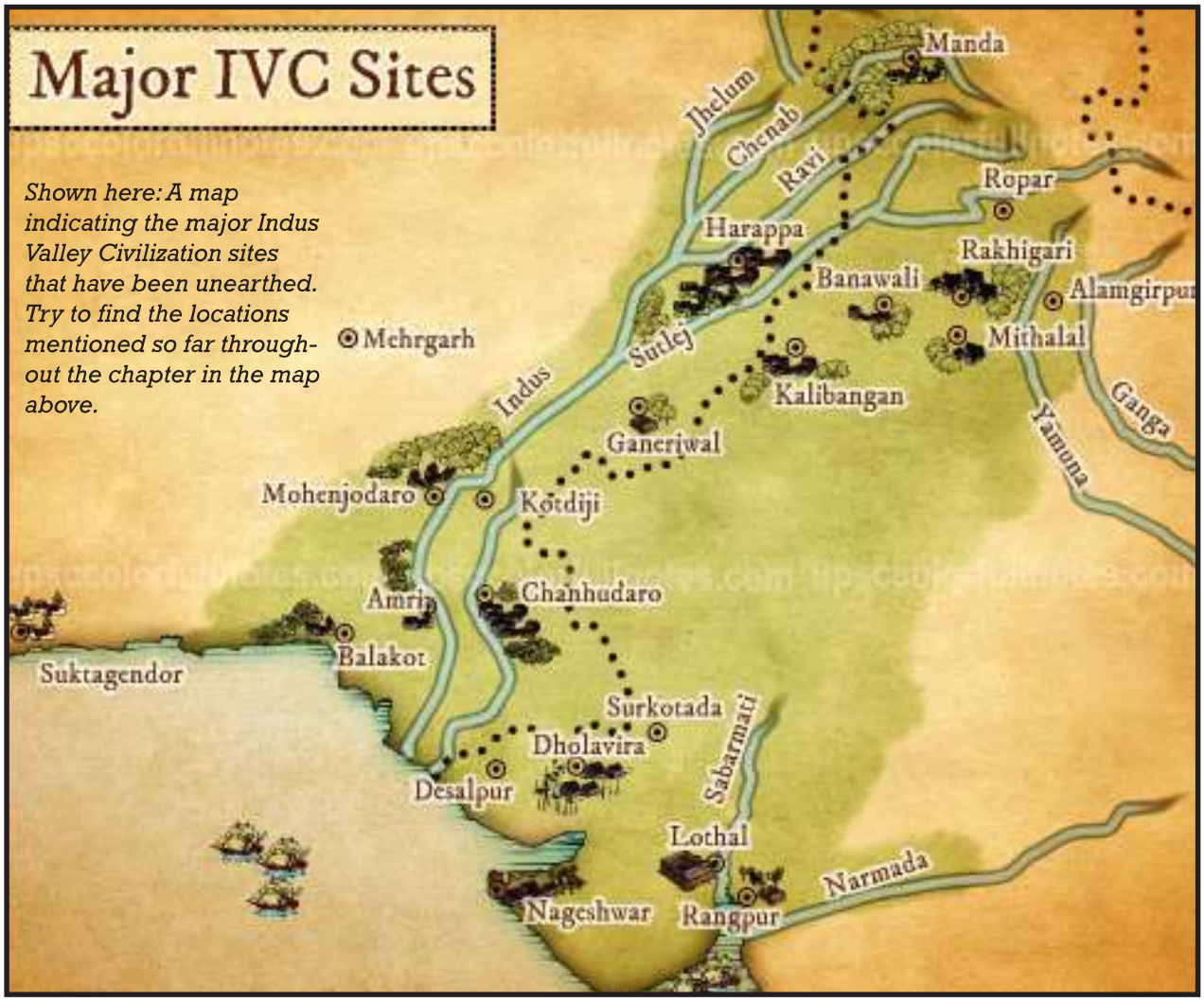
Above and Below: *Illustrated explanations of the Lost Wax Bronze Casting process.*

In bronze we find human as well as animal figures, the best example of the former being the statue of a girl popularly titled 'Dancing Girl'. Amongst animal figures in bronze the buffalo with its uplifted head, back and sweeping horns and the goat are of artistic merit. Bronze casting was popular at all the major centers of the Indus Valley Civilisation. The copper dog and bird of Lothal and the bronze figure of a bull from Kalibangan are great examples of bronze-casted statues.



Capital Offense - A crime punishable by the death penalty (*noun*)

Indus Valley Sites



Interesting facts about the Indus Valley Civilization:

1. At its peak, 10% of the world's total population lived in the ancient civilisation of the Indus Valley. Estimates reach as high as five million people.

2. Unlike other ancient civilisations, archaeologists have never found any evidence of palaces or temples in the Indus Valley. This suggests that there were no priests or kings.

3. The Indus Valley civilisation had precise measuring devices, including rulers and weight.

4. There is no archaeological evidence that the people of the Indus Valley had an army or weapons. This is unique amongst the ancient civilisations of the world.

5. Towns and cities were all built in a uniform, rectangular pattern. Some historians believe this is because they were re-built many

***Above**: A cartoon depiction of early Indus Valley settlers.*

Capital - from caput (*head*).

Indus Valley Seals and Script

Thousands of seals have been found from the Indus Valley sites. Most of them have short inscriptions with pictures of one-horned unicorns, buffaloes, tigers, goats, or elephants,. A typical seal was a flat rectangle or square, made from steatite.

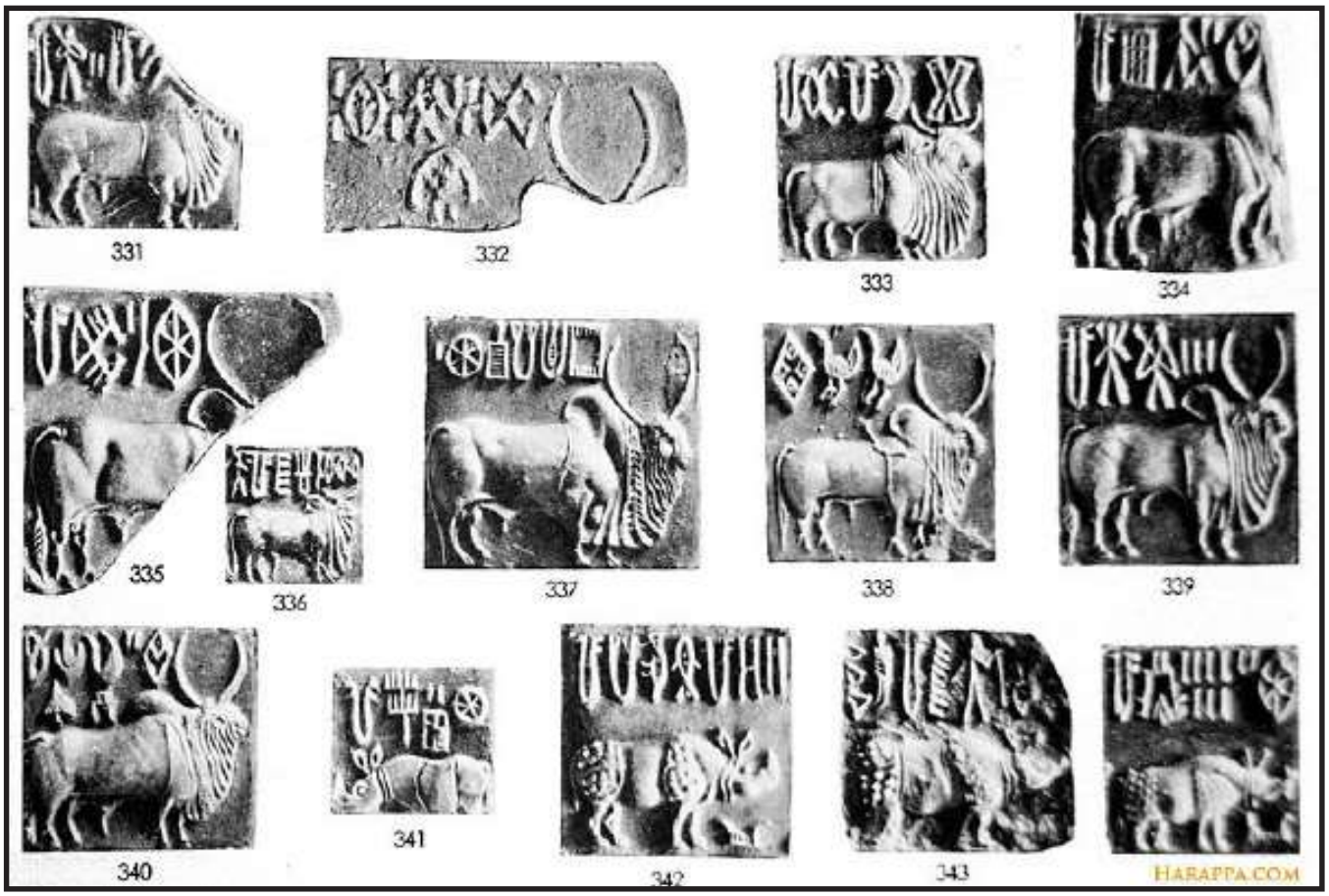
The Harappan script is still not deciphered. This means that we still do not know what the inscriptions mean. This script appears to have been written using a pointed stick in soft clay, or with a sharp tool to scratch marks on stone or metal. Around 400 different symbols have been discovered, but because of an absence of bilingual inscriptions, linguists and archaeologists are still unable to understand the script.

Above: An image of the longest single inscription in the Indus script consisting of 34 characters.

Above: As mentioned earlier, most of the Indus Valley seals depict various types of animals. In the seals above, an elephant, a bull, and what appears to be a rhinoceraus can be seen.

Bilingual - written or spoken in two languages (*adj*)

Source Study:



The images above as well as the text below are taken from Sir John Marshall's writings in 1931. In the text below, Marshall uses the seals above as proof that the type of bull shown (Bos Indicus) has been present in India since ancient times. An image of the Bos Indicus Gir cow is shown on the bottom right.

[Original 1931 text]

We have certain proof in Nos 327-40 and Possibly No. 542, that this type of bull was known in India in very early times. The characteristic hump on the shoulders allows of no doubt whatsoever. Fortunately the majority of seals on which this animal is represented are very well preserved.

Indeed, rather more care seems to have been taken with the portrayal of this animal than with some of the others. No. 337 is marvellously well engraved and finished; in feeling and in the careful portrayal of the muscles it will compare favourably with early glyphic art anywhere. The heavy wrinkled dewlap is especially well done, as is the case also with the bulls of seals 333 and 339.
[Marshall, Vol. II, p. 387]

Dewlap - from Old English *lappe* (loose piece). First usage of unknown origin.

Decline of the Indus Valley Civilization

We do not know why this civilisation came to an end, but a number of possibilities have been suggested.

One of the main candidates is climate change. The people were dependent on the heavy rains or monsoons to water their crops. Over time the monsoons seem to have gradually moved East and patterns of settlement seem to show that people followed them.

Another suggestion is that an earthquake caused one of the major rivers in the area to divert its course and eventually to dry up, again depriving the people of a vital water source.

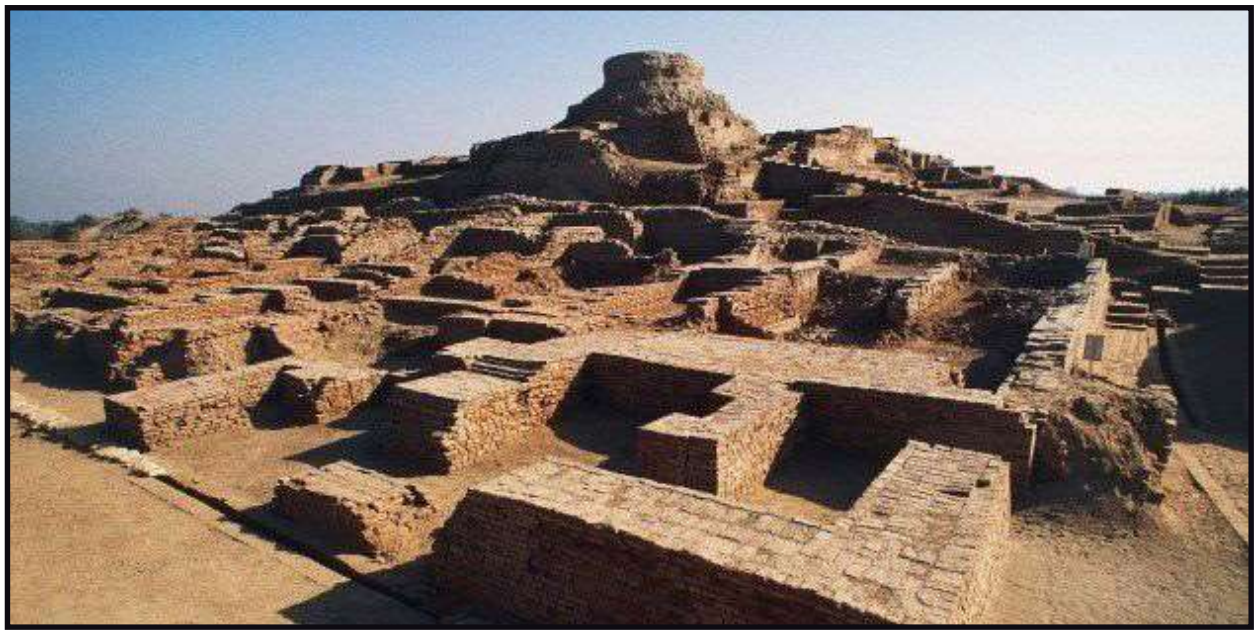
It is also possible that invaders forced the people to move on and abandon their cities.

A disease or an epidemic is another theory that has been suggested by many historians. However, at the moment there is no clear consensus on the exact reason for the civilization's decline.

Questions:

1. Suggest another possible reason for the collapse of the civilization.

2. Imagine you are a trader living in Harappa towards the end of the Indus Valley Civilization. Write a letter to your cousin in Mohenjodaro explaining what the situation in your city is like.



Above: A photograph of the ruins at Mohejodaro.

Decline - to grow weaker or smaller gradually (*verb*)

Case Study - Ancient Civilization in Tamil Nadu

There's conclusive proof of a civilisation existing in Tamil Nadu around 3,200 years ago, chief minister MK Stalin said on Thursday, citing scientific evidence for the same - a finding that means a thriving city-based river valley civilisation existed in the state, coinciding with the latter half of the Indus Valley civilisation.

Stalin presented findings showing that a Tamil civilization existed 3,200 years ago along the Tamiraparani river in present-day Thoothukudi and Tirunelveli districts -- a finding proved by carbon dating rice found in a burial urn in a US lab. He added that the state archaeological department would undertake excavations in neighboring states and other countries, after taking due permission.

Experts said the finding revealed the relationship between Tamil and Indus Valley civilisations. Speaking in the state assembly, Stalin said, "Recently, we have got the test results. I am extremely happy to announce that the rice samples have yielded the date of 1,155 BCE and hence, the Tamiraparani River Civilisation (Tirunelveli region in southern TN) is 3,200 years old and this is scientifically validated."

Above: A map of the Tirunelveli region
Below: Pottery shards excavated onsite

The CM said the state archaeology department is re-establishing the cultural history of Tamil Nadu through scientific studies and added that to establish Tamil roots, they would undertake excavations in historically important sites in neighboring states. To establish Tamil trade relationships, excavations will also be undertaken in Quseir al-Qadim and Pernica Anekke in Egypt, part of the Roman Empire and in Khor Rori in Oman. Tamil Brahmi Potsherds were found in Egypt and Oman.

"Efforts will be made to undertake exploration in these areas with the assistance of local archaeological institutions," Stalin said. It is believed that ancient Tamils were a seafaring race and that, as long as 2,500 years ago, were trading with Egypt, countries in the Arabian Peninsula, Thailand, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, he noted.

References:

Proof of civilisation 3,200 years ago in Tamil Nadu: Stalin. (2022). Retrieved 4 June 2022, from https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/proof-of-civilisation-3-200-years-ago-in-tamil-nadu-stalin-101631213154795.html

Decline - from Latin *de* (down) + Latin *clinare* (bend)